

The importance of sibling connections may vary for each individual; however, sibling connections provide a sense of continuity through childhood and this connection is often the longest relationship in an individual's life. The sibling connection may be intensified in families who have experienced abuse or neglect as siblings may be the ones that provide support and nurturing to each other when parents are unable to fulfill this role. Siblings who are placed together in foster care may have greater chances of reintegration, are more likely to reach other forms of permanency such as adoption or custodianship, have fewer disruptions, and experience generally better outcomes than siblings who are not placed together. Foster and adoptive families who are prepared to deal with this dynamic can help the siblings develop appropriate roles.

Separating siblings is detrimental to each child. Younger children who are separated must face life in unfamiliar circumstances without the support of the older child, and the older child is often left feeling responsible for the younger sibling(s) even when they are not placed together. Separating siblings teaches the children to walk away from conflict and increases the trauma they already feel in being separated from all that is familiar to them. It does not allow the children an opportunity to learn to resolve differences and develop stronger sibling relationships in a healthy, supportive environment.

The abuse of one sibling by another is often considered to be a reason for separating siblings. It is important to distinguish between true abuse and all other forms of sibling hostility while considering measures other than separation that can protect a child who is being abused. Removing a child from his/her sibling does not guarantee that the child will not be abused in another setting. Having foster and adoptive parents who are aware of the abuse and who put in place safety plans to address it is an option to keep siblings together.

A child with special needs is also often considered to be a reason to place siblings separately. A foster or adoptive family who is prepared to meet the special needs of a child as well as that child's siblings may offer the best opportunity for the child to receive the attention he/she needs. A child placed with his/her siblings may actually receive more personalized attention than a child placed into a family where there are other children with special needs requiring increased attention and resources.

Children who experience life in the child welfare system often form a variety of "sibling like" relationships with non-related brothers and sisters they have lived with both in their biological families and in foster care. Professionals placing children need to take into consideration the child's definition of who is and is not a sibling before making placement decisions.

Most waiting families registered on AdoptUSKids (83%) are willing to adopt more than one child. Some adoptive families express the desire to adopt "ready made" families of

sibling groups. Other larger families are willing to adopt larger sibling groups. Exceptions and incentives for families who adopt sibling groups are essential.

Research indicates that siblings placed together benefit from the sibling bond in ways that do not present problems to the parent / child relationship. Older children in the sibling group are thought to provide emotional support to their younger siblings. There is evidence to suggest that siblings who are placed separately in adoption have more anxiety and depression than those who are placed together.

Siblings who are placed separately are more likely to demonstrate greater emotional and behavioral problems. Research indicates that when siblings are placed together, they experience many emotional benefits with less moves and a lower risk for failed placements.

Adapted from Ten Myths and Realities of Sibling Adoption, National Center for Diligent Recruitment

